



## South San Diego County Beach Water Quality and Public Health

Border Field, Tijuana Slough, Imperial Beach, Silver Strand, and Coronado

For the current beach water quality status call (619) 338-2073

### *What unique factors affect south county beach water quality?*

#### **Sewage contaminated runoff from the Tijuana River**

- Tijuana is one of the fastest growing cities in Mexico. Its growth has outpaced its ability to collect and treat its wastewater. Some of this untreated wastewater/ sewage flows into the Tijuana River in Mexico.

### *Is the Tijuana River a year-round problem for south county beaches?*

#### **No**

- During dry weather, flows in the Tijuana River are captured by a diversion system and sent to the International Wastewater Treatment Plant for treatment.  
[www.ibwc.state.gov/html/san\\_diego.html](http://www.ibwc.state.gov/html/san_diego.html) Shoreline monitoring of bacterial levels indicates ocean water quality is good when river flows are being diverted to this facility.
- During summer and fall, water quality at beaches from Imperial Beach north to Coronado is generally like the rest of San Diego County - very good.

### *When does the Tijuana River flow impact the ocean?*

#### **Typically in the winter and spring (December to May)**

- Ocean contamination by the Tijuana River occurs during the rainy season, when untreated river flows (15+ million gallons/ day) enter the U.S. and Tijuana Estuary.
- The Department of Environmental Health (DEH) will issue a water contact closure for the ocean shoreline from the U.S./ Mexico border to the south end of Seacoast Drive (Border Field State Park and the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge shoreline) for the duration of the rainy season when the Tijuana River diversion system is off.

### *When does DEH close beaches north of the estuary?*

#### **When ocean currents at the estuary mouth are moving northward**

- Depending upon the direction of ocean currents and other factors, contaminated runoff from the estuary mouth can impact the Imperial Beach, Silver Strand State Beach and Coronado ocean shorelines. DEH uses real time ocean current data from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography to determine when to issue closures for these beaches.  
<http://sdcoos.ucsd.edu/data/CurrentRiver.cfm>
- Closures are not limited to the days immediately following rainfall because contaminated river flows can continue to enter the estuary and impact the ocean days or weeks after the last rain.
- Water contact closures are coordinated with local lifeguards who post signs.
- The Department of Environmental Health (DEH) advises beach users to avoid contact with ocean waters in the closure area and where closure signs are posted.

***Why should I be concerned about swimming or surfing in contaminated water?***  
**Exposure may cause illness and can be spread among family, friends and co-workers**



- Sewage contaminated water may contain human pathogens that can cause illnesses such as respiratory illness, skin rashes, and gastro-intestinal illness (vomiting and diarrhea).

***How can I find out if the beach is closed to water contact before I go?***

**Call the DEH phone hotline or check the internet**

- For the current status of beach water quality in San Diego County call 619-338-2073, updated 7 days/ week. Or go to [www.earth911.org](http://www.earth911.org) , updated Monday – Friday.

***Where can I find more information on beach water quality?***

**Check the DEH and others' web sites**

- Beach water samples are collected at 13 locations between the U.S./ Mexico border and Coronado every week. Samples are analyzed for bacterial indicators of fecal contamination. To see a grade for your beach based upon sample results, go to [www.healthebay.org/brc/statemap.asp](http://www.healthebay.org/brc/statemap.asp)
- **NOTE:** *These grades represent the recent trend in water quality, but not the current status.*
- For annual beach closure reports for San Diego County, go to [www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/lwq/beachbay/#documents](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/lwq/beachbay/#documents)
- If there is not a closure when you visit the beach, but you suspect contaminated water, report it to the lifeguards. They can contact DEH.
- Report an illness suspected to be related to ocean water contact to DEH by calling 619-338-2073. Follow instructions to speak with DEH staff. Or go to [www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/lwq/beachbay/pdf/ois\\_form\\_2005.pdf](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/deh/lwq/beachbay/pdf/ois_form_2005.pdf)